



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau

# **Child and Family Services Reviews Stakeholder Interview Guide**

**February 2002**

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau**

Stakeholder interviews are conducted in the local review sites and at the State level during the on-site component of the child and family services reviews. The purpose of the stakeholder interviews is to collect information for evaluating and rating the systemic factors that are examined during the child and family services reviews.

The review team will interview stakeholders who are representative of the types of organizations and individuals who participated in the development of the State's Child and Family Services Plan, as required at 45 CFR 1357.15(1). These include representatives of courts, administrative review bodies, children's guardian ad litem, and other individuals or bodies assigned responsibility for representing the best interests of children. The following core stakeholders must be interviewed:

**State Stakeholders**

State child welfare director  
State child welfare program specialists  
State court system representatives  
Major tribal representatives  
State administrative review bodies

**Local Stakeholders**

Local child welfare agency administrator  
Foster parent(s)  
Juvenile court judge  
Law enforcement representative  
Social worker(s) from the local agency  
Guardian(s) ad litem  
Local administrative review bodies

Review teams may interview additional stakeholders at both the State and local levels, as needed; see the *Child and Family Services Reviews Procedures Manual* for a listing.

**Instructions for Using the Stakeholder Interview Guide**

- This interview guide lists the core questions to be asked at each stakeholder interview. The core question(s) represent the central theme(s) for each systemic issue that the reviewer should attempt to address during stakeholder interviews. The ratings that the review team assigns to the systemic factors should be based on thorough responses to and explanations of the core questions.
- While each individual stakeholder may not be able to answer every core question, reviewers should be able to elicit all the needed information from the range of stakeholders interviewed at the State and local site levels. Following each core question is a list of possible stakeholders who may be able to address the question. Reviewers, however, will need to make judgements about which of the questions they should pursue with each individual stakeholder.
- Each core question is followed by a list of exploratory issues that reviewers should use as appropriate (to the stakeholder and the situation) during the interviews. The exploratory issues are guiding questions that, if answered, will enable the reviewer to determine the most appropriate response to the core question(s). Reviewers should be prepared to rephrase the exploratory issues, or ask related questions, in order to explore the core question(s) fully, for example, by asking “why” or “why not,” as appropriate.
- In addition to the core questions and exploratory issues, the Administration for Children and Families Regional Office Team Leader, in collaboration with the State and the Children's Bureau, will identify State-specific issues from the Statewide Assessment that need further examination through stakeholder interviews; these will then be listed in Section II of the interview guide.

- **Reviewers should be careful to pursue issues only with stakeholders who have first-hand knowledge of the issue under review. The information recorded on the Stakeholder Interview Guide, and therefore subsequently used to evaluate the agency's performance, should reflect the input of stakeholders with first-hand, well-founded knowledge of the issue. (Some stakeholders may offer second-hand experience or express opinions that are not supported by facts or experience; this information should not be recorded on the interview guide.)**
- Interviews should be limited to approximately one hour. In order to collect information, reviewers should be thoroughly familiar with the core questions and exploratory issues listed in the Stakeholder Interview Guide. Reviewers should note that a stakeholder(s) may provide information out of sequence from the Stakeholder Interview Guide.
- The Local Site Leaders or their designee should record the notes from all the stakeholder interviews in the appropriate blank space on a Stakeholder Interview Guide. Preferably, reviewers will use a single Stakeholder Interview Guide, such as in an interview notebook, adding additional pages as needed to record notes under each section of the form.
- Reviewers should record the name or title of the stakeholders being interviewed beside the notes of the stakeholder's comments. This will provide documentation of the sources of information if needed later for determining how many stakeholders commented on particular issues, or for clarification of the comments.

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. Interviewer(s):
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B. Date(s) of Interviews:
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C. County and State Reviewed:
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## Section I

### Item 1. Safety Outcomes for Children (All Stakeholders)

#### Core Questions:

- How effectively is the agency protecting children from maltreatment, in general?
- How effectively is the agency protecting children in their own homes, whenever possible and appropriate?

#### Exploratory Issues:

- Is the agency able to respond to incoming reports of child maltreatment in a timely manner, including at night and on weekends?
- What are the agency's interventions to protect children from maltreatment, and are they effective (for example, is the State taking the right actions to protect children)?
- How does the agency identify risk factors that might lead to children being maltreated or to the recurrence of maltreatment, and is this approach effective? How does the agency respond to the identified risk factors in order to prevent maltreatment, and is this approach effective?
- How does the agency ensure that children remain safe after they are placed in foster care, and is this approach effective?
- How does the agency ensure that risk of harm and safety issues are continually assessed while families receive protective services, and at key decision-making points throughout the case (for example, at the point of reunification or case closure)?
- How does the agency ensure that the health and safety of the children are the primary concerns in placement and reunification decisions, and is this approach effective?

## Item 2. Permanency Outcomes for Children (All Stakeholders)

### Core Questions:

- How effectively is the agency helping children in foster care to achieve permanency and stability in their lives?
- How effectively is the agency preserving or maintaining the important connections and relationships of children while they are in foster care?

### Exploratory Issues:

- How well does the agency reunify families, place children for adoption, and finalize adoptions?
  - Are the agency's approaches effective?
  - How effective is the agency at accomplishing this in a timely manner?
  - Are there barriers to achieving reunification or adoption in a timely manner? If so, what are the barriers?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the agency help all of the populations of children it serves (for example, racial and ethnic groups, age groups, children entering foster care through the juvenile justice system, if applicable, and other groups of children) to achieve permanency?
  - Are these approaches effective?
- How does the agency comply with Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) provisions concerning notification of tribes, observing placement preferences, and working with tribes and courts around decisions for Native American children in foster care?
- Are these approaches effective? What are the barriers to the State's compliance with ICWA, and how are the barriers being addressed?
- How do the courts help children in foster care achieve permanency in a timely manner, and is this approach effective?
- Does the agency engage in concurrent planning (working toward two different goals, such as adoption and reunification, simultaneously)? What are the results of this approach?
- What practices does the agency engage in to place children in foster care in their own communities or counties and are these practices effective?
- Under what circumstances does the agency place children out of State?
- How does the agency seek out relatives, including fathers not in the home, and use them as placement resources for children? How effective is the agency's approach?
- What practices does the agency use to keep brothers and sisters together in foster care placements, and are these practices effective?
- How often do children in foster care change placements, and what factors contribute to placement changes?
- How often and under what circumstances are children in foster care able to visit their families? Where do the visits occur?

### **Item 3. Well-Being Outcomes for Children and Families (All Stakeholders)**

#### **Core Questions:**

- How effectively is the agency providing services that help parents to meet their children's needs?
- How effectively does the agency provide the appropriate mental health and physical health services for children?
- How effectively does the agency address the educational needs of the children whom it serves?

#### **Exploratory Issues:**

- How are the needs of children, their parents, and their foster parents assessed in developing case plans? How are their needs assessed in ongoing work, or at key intervals?
- How does the agency engage children and their parents or guardians in case planning activities, and is this approach effective?
- How often are fathers involved in case planning activities? What efforts are made by the agency to locate and involve fathers?
- How often do agency workers visit children and their parents with open cases?
- How does the agency identify and address the educational needs of the children receiving inhome and foster care services?
  - Are the agency's approaches effective?
  - Are there barriers to the agency identifying and addressing the educational needs of children?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the agency identify and address the physical health and medical needs of the children receiving inhome and foster care services?
  - Are the agency's approaches effective?
  - Are there barriers to the agency identifying and addressing the physical health and medical needs of children?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the agency identify and address the dental health needs of the children receiving inhome and foster care services?
  - Are the agency's approaches effective?
  - Are there barriers to the agency identifying and addressing the dental health needs of children?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the agency identify and address the emotional and mental health needs of the children receiving inhome and foster care services?
  - Are the agency's approaches effective?
  - Are there barriers to the agency identifying and addressing the emotional and mental health needs of children?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?

#### **Item 4. Statewide Information System (State and County Agency Staff)**

**Core Question:**

- How effectively does the agency's information system provide information on children served in the foster care system?

**Exploratory Issues:**

- How well is the information system able to determine the status, demographics, location, and permanency goals for all children in foster care in the county (or State)? Are the data produced on these indicators accurate?
- What are the gaps in the information system from the State and local perspectives, and what types of additional information should the system capture in order to determine the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for all children in foster care?
- How uniform is the State's information system capacity on a statewide basis?
- How accessible is the information in the system to staff, supervisors, managers, and administrators? What barriers exist to accessing information from the system?
- How are the data generated by the information system used by staff, supervisors, managers, and administrators?



## **Item 5. Case Review System (State and County Agency Staff, Selected Local External Stakeholders, for example, Foster Parents, Court, Attorneys, Advocates, Foster Care Review Board Members)**

### **Core Questions:**

- How effective are the agency's provisions for conducting court hearings, case reviews, and case planning in helping children in foster care to achieve permanency in their lives?

### **Exploratory Issues:**

- Do all children have current case plans?
  - How are case plans developed, and who participates in developing them (for example, children, parents, foster parents)?
  - When and how are the case plans updated?
  - How are case plans used to guide the actual work that occurs with children and families?
- What procedures are in place for periodic reviews for children in foster care (for example, 6-month judicial or administrative reviews)?
  - How effective are the periodic reviews in promoting permanency for children in foster care, including children in related placements?
  - Who participates in the reviews? Children? Parents? Foster and preadoptive families? Others?
  - How are foster and preadoptive parents notified of agency or court reviews and encouraged to participate?
- What procedures are in place for permanency hearings for children in foster care?
  - How effective are the hearings in promoting permanency for children in foster care, including children in related placements?
  - Who participates in the hearings? Children? Parents? Foster and preadoptive families? Others?
  - How are parents, foster parents, and preadoptive parents notified of hearings and encouraged to participate?
- How effective is the agency in pursuing termination of parental rights (TPR) for children who have been in foster care for at least 15 of the past 22 months?
  - Under what circumstances are exceptions made to the TPR requirements?
  - How are these exceptions reviewed and documented?
- Are children who are placed out of State visited by their caseworkers at least once each 12 months?
  - If not, does someone else from the agency visit them at least once each 12 months, and if so, who?

## Item 6. Quality Assurance System (State and County Agency Staff, External Stakeholders)

### Core Question:

- How effective are the agency's provisions for monitoring and evaluating its performance and the outcomes for children and families, including the performance of contract-service providers?

### Exploratory Issues:

- What services are in place to protect the health and safety of children in foster care placements, and are these services effective?
- Does the agency have standards that address the health and safety of children in foster care placement in addition to its licensing standards for foster family homes and other placement facilities?
- How do issues such as caseload size, supervisor to worker ratio, or frequency and quality of supervision affect the quality of work in the agency?
- What policies does the agency have regarding the supervision of child welfare workers, and are the policies both used and effective?
- How does the agency monitor the quality of its work and the outcomes for children and families, beyond frontline supervision? Is there an identifiable quality assurance system?
- How does the agency monitor the quality of its workers' performance, and is this approach effective? Are these provisions in place statewide?
- How do the county (or State) agency's quality assurance measures help ensure that children in the county or State are protected from maltreatment and that children in foster care achieve permanency on a timely basis? Are these approaches effective?
- How are representatives from outside the county or State agency (for example, service recipients, service providers, or advocates) involved in evaluating outcomes for children and families?
- How does the agency use the information obtained from quality assurance activities to guide agency programs, policies, and practices, and is this approach effective?
- What does the quality assurance system monitor?
- What reports does the quality assurance system produce?

## **Item 7. Staff and Provider Training (State and County Agency Staff, Local External Stakeholders)**

### **Core Questions:**

- How effectively does the agency provide the training that the staff need to do their work?
- How effectively does the agency provide the necessary training for foster families, adoptive families, and staff of child care facilities on how to serve children in foster care?

### **Exploratory Issues:**

- Does the agency have an overall training plan?
- How does the agency provide preservice or initial training for State child welfare staff, and is this approach effective?
  - At what point is the initial training provided (for example, before a caseworker receives a caseload)?
  - What types of training are provided?
  - Are there barriers to staff receiving this training? If so, what are the barriers?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the agency provide advanced or ongoing training to State child welfare staff, and is this approach effective?
  - At what points is the advanced or ongoing training provided (for example, on a monthly basis)?
  - What types of training are provided?
  - Are there barriers to ongoing training of staff? If so, what are the barriers?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the agency provide preservice or initial training for foster and adoptive parents, and is this approach effective?
  - Are all foster and adoptive parents trained?
  - What types of training are provided?
  - At what point is the initial training provided (for example, before licensure, approval, or child placement)?
  - Are there barriers to foster and adoptive parents receiving this training? If so, what are the barriers?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the agency provide advanced or ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents, and is this approach effective?
  - Are all foster and adoptive parents trained?
  - What types of training are provided?
  - At what point(s) is the advanced or ongoing training provided (for example, on a monthly basis)?
  - Are there barriers to foster and adoptive parents receiving this training? If so, what are the barriers?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the agency provide training for the staff of State-licensed or -approved child care facilities, and is this approach effective?
  - Have all staff received training?
  - How often and at what point is the training provided?
  - What types of training are provided?
  - Are there barriers to the staff receiving training? If so, what are the barriers?
  - How are the barriers being addressed?
- How does the training that the agency provides to its staff, foster and adoptive parents, and service providers support the agency's mission, values, and practices?
- How does the agency measure the impact of its training?

## **Item 8. Service Array (State and County Agency Staff, External Stakeholders)**

### **Core Questions:**

- How effectively does the agency provide the range of services needed by the children and families it serves, including families in their own homes and children in foster care?

### **Exploratory Issues:**

- How does the agency provide services to protect children in their own homes, and is this approach effective?
  - Are any inhome services needed but unavailable? If so, what are they?
- How does the agency provide services to promote timely reunification of children in foster care with their families, and is this approach effective?
  - Are any reunification services needed but unavailable? If so, what are they?
- How does the agency provide services that promote timely adoptions and support for adoptive families after placement and finalization, and is this approach effective?
  - Are any adoption or support services needed but unavailable? If so, what are they?
- How does the agency provide services to youth in foster care to prepare them for independent living and to make the transition from foster care to adulthood?
  - Are there independent living services needed but unavailable? If so, what are they?
- How does the agency tailor services to meet the unique, individualized needs of the children and families it serves, and is this approach effective?
- How accessible are the services to children and families who need them, in terms of location? Cost of services? Waiting lists? Range of available providers? Other accessibility issues?
  - How is the agency addressing barriers to accessibility of services?
- Are all of the agency's services available statewide? If not, where are services unavailable?

## **Item 9. Agency Responsiveness to Community (State and County Agency Staff, External Stakeholders)**

### **Core Question:**

- How effectively does the agency collaborate and coordinate its services with other agencies, the community, tribes, and other related groups?

### **Exploratory Issues:**

- (Question for internal stakeholders) How does the agency involve external stakeholders in developing its Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and the Annual Progress and Services Reports, and is this approach effective?
- (Question for external stakeholders) How does the agency collaborate with other child and family serving agencies in the community (State), particularly those serving the same populations of children and families as the agency, and is this approach effective?
- How does the agency incorporate input from community (State) stakeholders into its planning, policies, and practices, and is this approach effective?
- How does the agency collaborate or consult with tribes (if applicable), and is this approach effective? What agreements or protocols are in place between the agency and the tribes?
- How does the agency ensure that it complies with the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act with regard to the children it serves?
- How are services to children and families coordinated with other Federal or federally assisted programs in the State?
- Is the community aware of the agency's mission, and if so, how do community members view that mission?
- What are the strengths and areas needing improvement regarding the agency's ability to respond to the community's (State's) expectations about protecting children from maltreatment?
- How does the agency serve all relevant populations in the community (State) (for example, racial and ethnic groups, age groups, rural versus urban populations, children with special needs, sibling groups), and is this approach effective?

## **Item 10. Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing/Approval/Recruitment (State and County Agency Staff, Selected External Stakeholders, for example, Foster Parents, Court Personnel, Service Providers)**

### **Core Question:**

- How effectively is the agency recruiting, licensing, and retaining the number and diversity of foster and adoptive families needed to care for its children in foster care?

### **Exploratory Issues:**

- How adequate is the county's (State's) current pool of foster families in meeting the family-based foster care placement needs of the children it serves? (For example, what are the number of homes, locations, capacity to parent children in need of foster care placement?)
- How adequate is the county's (or State's) current pool of adoptive families in meeting the adoption placement needs of the children it serves? (For example, what are the number of homes, locations, capacity of potential adoptive parents to parent children in need of adoption?)
- How does the agency recruit foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in need of placement in the State, and is this approach effective?
- What initiatives, programs, and services are in place to assist in the retention of foster and adoptive homes, and are they effective?
- How does the State monitor the supply of homes relative to the children in care needing placement, and is this approach effective?
- How do the agency's licensing standards ensure the safety and protection of children in foster care, such as by including provisions about admission policies, safety, sanitation, and protection of civil rights, and is this approach effective?
- Does the agency apply the same standards equally to all licensed or approved foster homes, including relative and nonrelative homes?
- How does the State manage the provision for criminal background clearances on all foster and adoptive families that are licensed or approved by the agency or used as resources for children in the State's care and custody, and is this approach effective?
- What are the procedures for relicensure of homes? Is the agency able to relicense homes on a timely basis?
- How adequate are the numbers and training of staff who perform the licensing and recruitment functions?
- How does the agency recruit and use adoptive families from across State lines or other jurisdictions?
- How does the agency use available resources, such as adoption exchanges, for placing children for adoption in other jurisdictions, and is this approach effective?
- What are the barriers to inter-jurisdictional adoptions, and how are the barriers being addressed?

**Section II**  
**STATE-SPECIFIC ISSUES**

<b>Item 11.</b>
<b>Core Question:</b>
<b>Exploratory Issues:</b>

**Item 12.****Core Question:****Exploratory Issues:**